

Executive Officer's Statement
California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board

February 17, 2005

Helping Reach Victims of Glendale Train Derailment

Local Victim Witness Assistance Centers responded swiftly to the January 26 train derailment in Glendale. The Board joined forces with the Office of Emergency Services (OES) to offer assistance to the Los Angeles County Victim Witness Assistance Center, the Ventura County Victim Witness Assistance Center, and other local victim advocates as soon as it became apparent that the derailment was the result of a criminal action. Ted Boughton, Victim Compensation Program Deputy Executive Officer, worked with OES and local coordinators to identify what the local centers needed. Mass casualty protocols jointly developed by OES and the Board were activated to facilitate decision-making and communication. The Board determined that any person aboard any of the three trains involved would potentially be eligible for victim compensation. In addition, employees from a nearby Costco and other individuals in the area at the time of the incident played an important role in rescue efforts, potentially qualifying them for the Board's Good Samaritan Program.

The Board took several immediate steps to help the local centers. Board staff provided fact sheets on the Victim Compensation Program and the Good Samaritan Program that were specific to the incident and printed in both English and Spanish. They also sent boxes of brochures and applications overnight to both Los Angeles and Ventura County; issued an information bulletin to victim groups and media in both counties; and posted information for victims of the derailment on the Board's website. The Board's call center staff had information about the incident and stood ready to help callers reach assistance in the appropriate county. Local centers reported they were assisting 45 victims of the derailment with applications as of the first week in February.

Board Staff Participates in Outreach Activities to Improve Awareness of the Program

Recent efforts to raise awareness about the Victim Compensation Program will help mental health providers, law enforcement officers, and consular officers with the State Department in Mexico better understand victim compensation and how to help crime victims.

Board staff updated the Resource Guide for Consular Officers and provided information and instructional material for a January training on victim services presented by the State Department to U.S. consular officers stationed in Mexico. The material the Board provided will help the consular officers advise California residents who are victimized when traveling, working, or visiting in Mexico.

Often a consular officer is the primary contact for crime victims injured in Mexico. Sometimes he or she must notify surviving family members of a death. Realizing this, the U.S. State Department's International Victim Services Section sponsored the training session for some 40 consular officers to alert them to the variety of victim services that the border states of California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico provide to their citizens.

Also in January, Board staff attended the San Diego Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment. Hundreds of mental health providers gathered at this important annual conference, and Board staff had the opportunity to share information with them during the course of the weeklong meeting. The Board also hosted an information booth at the conference.

In early February, Board staff mailed more than 500 packets of information to California police chiefs and sheriffs. The packets included program brochures; compensation information cards specially designed for law enforcement officers to hand to crime victims at the time a crime happens; and

posters to display in precinct and substation lobbies, where crime victims can see them when they come to file reports and meet with detectives.

California Department of Corrections Increases Collections from Inmates' Accounts

On January 1, the percentage collected from inmate trust accounts by the California Department of Corrections (CDC) for the Restitution Fund increased from 30 percent to 40 percent of each inmate's account balance. The CDC garnishes the funds from each inmate's account every month to help satisfy the amount the inmate owes in restitution fines and orders. The increase could result in an additional \$3 million a year in the Restitution Fund. In 2007, a final increase will bring the inmate trust account garnishment to 50 percent.

The first increase in years occurred on July 1, 2003 when the percentage increased from 20 percent to 30 percent. That increase was projected to generate an additional \$4 million a year for the Restitution Fund and, indeed, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003-04, collections increased to \$12 million from about \$8 million the year before.

New Statistical Reports Debut

February marks the debut of a new report describing Victim Compensation Program activities. Each month Board staff will post information for the fiscal year-to-date. These reports will highlight how the Board helps crime victims in California. Tables and charts feature the number of applications and bills the Board receives, application processing time, and total payments the Board makes to or on behalf of victims. The Statistical Data Report will be updated and posted on the Board's website every month.